

Mason, John Thomson House
(Worthington House)
N. E. Corner 24th & Prospect Sts., N.W.
Washington, D. C.

HABS No. DC-167
HABS
D.C.
GEO
11-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D. C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

APPENDIX
FOLLOWING

Addendum to

John Thomas⁸⁸⁴ Mason House
3425 Prospect Street, N.W.
Washington (Georgetown)
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-167

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Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. DC-167

JOHN THOMSON MASON HOUSE

("Quality Hill") (Washington, D.C.)

Location: 3425 Prospect Street, N.W. (Georgetown) Washington, D.C.

Present Owners and Occupants: Senator and Mrs. Claiborne Pell (1969)

Present Use: Private residence (1969)

Significance: This structure is one of the finest of the few surviving large, free-standing, late eighteenth century town houses in Georgetown. It has been occupied by a number of individuals prominent in local and national affairs.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: ca. 1797-1798. John Thomson Mason bought Lots 41 and 42 in Georgetown for L 450 in 1798. The lots were described as "...in the tenure and occupation of the said John Thomson Mason...". Both the price of the lots and the wording of the deed indicate that the house was already standing in 1798. Furthermore, a letter written by Mason in March 1798 mentions his residence in Georgetown. In the tax assessment records for 1800-1807, the structure was assessed as a "new house".
2. Architect: None known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1221, Lot 835 out of Lot 808 in the City of Washington (formerly Square 51, Lot 42 in Peter, Beatty, Threlkeld and Deakins Addition to Georgetown). Its original address was 80 Prospect Street. The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the office of the Recorder of Deeds, Washington, D.C.

1798 John Threlkeld and wife to John Thomson Mason Lots 41 and 42
Deed August 29, 1798 Recorded August 31, 1798
Liber D-4, folio 85

"...now in the tenure and occupation of the said John Thomson Mason...."

- 1807 John Thomson Mason and wife, Elizabeth to John Teackle
Deed October 17, 1807 Recorded January 21, 1808 Liber
T-19, folio 36.

"...beginning at a stone no. 30 being the S.W. corner of the brick house now occupied by the said Teackle and at the intersection of Prospect and Fayette Streets....", including lots 41, 42, 53, 54, 55 in Peter, Beatty, Threlkeld and Deakins Addition to Georgetown.

Consideration \$5000

- 1810 John Teackle and wife, Elizabeth to Charles
Worthington
Deed October 17, 1810 Recorded December 26, 1810
Liber Z-25, folio 356.

"All the messuage and tenement in Georgetown whereon the said John Teackle now resides being the same which hath been conveyed to the aforesaid John Teackle by John Mason...."

- 1836 Charles Worthington dies and by his Will devises to his daughter, Catherine Pearson, and her heirs the house in which he resides fronting on Prospect and Fayette. Will September 17, 1835 Probated September 28, 1836 Will Book 4, page 325.

- 1856 Catherine Pearson to James Kearney
Deed June 20, 1856 Recorded September 9, 1859
Liber JAS 121, folio 129

Consideration \$6000

- 1862 James Kearney dies and by his Will gives all his estate to his wife, Louisa Kearney. Will September 19, 1861 Probated January 25, 1862 Will Book 9, page 25

- 1889 Louisa Kearney to Maria O'Reiley, unmarried
Deed July 29, 1889 Recorded July 30, 1889 Liber 1410,
folio 320

- 1898 Maria O'Reiley, unmarried to Blanche Kearney,
unmarried
Deed May 31, 1898 Recorded June 4, 1898 Liber 2331,
folio 30

- 1910 Blanche Kearney, unmarried, dies May 15, 1910 and devises said property in trust to her nephew Alexander Kearney, executor for her two nieces, Louise Kearney and Estelle Kearney, for life or until their marriage, and upon the death or marriage of both, then to be divided among the said two nieces and two nephews, Alexander Kearney and George Kearney, and provided that in the event that one or more of said nieces or nephews should die leaving issue, the said issue shall receive the share which the present would have received if living. Will November 28, 1908 Probated June 9, 1910 Will Book 73, page 594
- 1915 By Decree of the Supreme Court of D.C. passed March 5, 1915 (Equity 32401, Docket 70):
- Louise Kearney vs. Alexander Kearney, Estelle Kearney, George Kearney
- Alexander Kearney and A. Leftwich Sinclair were appointed trustees to take charge of and administer all of the property both real and personal formerly belonging to the estate of Blanche Kearney.
- In accordance with a certain stipulation filed in the Equity (32401) Cause on May 7, 1915, all parties agreed to terminate and end the trusts under the Will of Blanche Kearney and "... Louise Kearney in the exercise of the option given her in said stipulation has elected to take the hereinbefore described property as a part of her share in the estate of said Blanche Kearney..."
- Alexander Kearney, A. Leftwich Sinclair, trustees Estelle Kearney, George Kearney, unmarried, Alexander Kearney in his own right et ux Elizabeth Crosby to Louise Kearney.
Deed June 10, 1915 recorded June 10, 1915 Liber 3802, folio 136.
- Louise Kearney, unmarried, to A. Leftwich Sinclair
Deed July 13, 1915 Recorded July 13, 1915 Liber 3797, folio 394.

"In Trust to rent, lease, manage and control said ground and premises...."

A. Leftwich Sinclair, trustee for Louise Kearney, unmarried, Louise de Iturbide (nee Kearney) and husband, Augustin to Albert Adsit Clemons
Deed August 21, 1915 Recorded August 23, 1915 Liber 3829, folio 75.

1938 Albert Adsit Clemons dies March 17, 1938, directing that the proceeds and assets of his estate be transferred to Harvard University as an endowment to be received and known as the Albert Adsit Clemons endowment. At the time of his death he was residing at 3400 Prospect Street--Halcyon House. F. Urban Wolpert, George H. Paltridge, and William E. Huntington were appointed trustees.

Will March 13, 1938 Probated May 12, 1938 Will Book 252, page 586.

1942 F. Urban Wolpert, George H. Paltridge William E. Huntington, trustees to Norma Bowler Lewis
Deed October 13, 1942 Recorded October 13, 1942 Liber 7801, folio 197.

1961 Norma Bowler Lewis to Claiborne Pell and wife, Nuala Pell
Deed May 11, 1961 Recorded May 12, 1961 Liber 11598, folio 173.

4. Alterations and additions: The house was restored between 1942-1944 by Lady Lewis. The restoration included installation of electricity, heating and plumbing, and structural repairs such as shoring up walls, sheathing and tiling the roof. Paint was removed from mantels, and one mantel in the northeast bedroom was replaced. The former stable was converted to a pantry. The twin front doors were added; they consist of one reportedly salvaged by Albert Clemons during alterations on the U.S. Capitol, and one copied to match it. The arch in the center hall came from the Francis Scott Key House (HABS No.DC-23), and the black and white tile floor in the vestibule came from an old building on Capitol Hill. (Interviews with Lady Norma Bowler Lewis).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

John Thomson Mason was born on March 15, 1765 at Chappawamsic, Stafford County, Virginia. He was a younger son of Thomson Mason and Mary Barnes Mason. Mary's father, Colonel Abraham Barnes, of

Leonardtown, St. Mary's County, Maryland, was a prosperous tobacco merchant. Since much of his time was spent in England, his son-in-law, Thomson Mason, managed the business for him. Mary had two brothers, Richard, who was a prominent leader in the Revolutionary party in Maryland, and John, whose firm, Barnes and Ridgate, owned stores in Georgetown and on the shores of the Potomac before the Revolutionary War. Since neither of Mary's brothers had children who survived them, her son, John Thomson Mason, ultimately inherited property from both of his uncles. From Richard he received "Tudor Hall" near Leonardtown and from John "Montpelier" in Washington County, Maryland. (Poole; John Thomson Mason Commonplace Book).

When John Thomson Mason was very young, his father moved to "Raspberry Plain" in Loudoun County, Virginia. Thomson Mason took an active part in the government of Virginia during the Revolution and in the political settlement afterward. His "Letters of a British American" were published in Rind's Virginia Gazette during 1774. Thomson Mason died at "Raspberry Plain" in 1785, leaving his Loudoun County lands to his eldest son, Stevens Thomson Mason, United States Senator from Virginia, and a part of his property in Stafford and Prince William Counties to John Thomson Mason. (Stafford County Deeds)

John Thomson Mason was educated at David Griffith's Academy in Loudoun County by the Reverend Robert Buchan of Overwharton Parish and at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. (David Griffith Account Book) He was admitted to the bar in Maryland and became an eminent member of his profession. In January 1797 John Thomson Mason married seventeen-year-old Elizabeth Beltzhoover, daughter of Melchor Beltzhoover of Frederick County, Maryland. (Poole, p. 118).

During Mason's tenancy of the house on Prospect Street he became active in public affairs in Georgetown as well as on a national scale. He apparently had no interest in public office, for in 1801 he refused President Thomas Jefferson's offer to become Attorney General of the United States and ten years later refused a similar offer by President Madison. Nor would he accept the post of Attorney General of Maryland.

The Prospect Street home in Georgetown was the scene of much social activity. Some of the guests were leaders of the nation. According to reminiscences by John Thomson Mason, Jr., Thomas Jefferson visited the Mason house so plainly dressed on one occasion that a servant refused to admit him! (Poole, John Thomson Mason Commonplace Book)

It is not clear how long John Thomson Mason and his family lived in the house. Legal documents concerning the settlement of his brother's estate describe him as "of George Town" in 1804. (Stafford County Deeds) Mason's interests drew him more and more away from Georgetown and involved him in the complicated operations of plantations in the extremities of southern and western Maryland.

In 1806-1807 Mason's flour accounts from "Montpelier" are noted as paid by him in "Georgetowne." (John Thomson Mason Account Book) When he sold the house on Prospect Street in 1807, however, the new owner was already living in it as a tenant. Mason is described in the deed as "late of Georgetown, now of Washington County," while the deed is headed at St. Mary's County, Maryland. At the time Mason and his family were living on his estate in Maryland. (St. Mary's County Land Records; Washington County Deed; Rodney Papers) On August 8, 1808 John Thomson Mason paid freight charges on a barge-load of furniture shipped from Georgetown, which suggests that the family took the last of their possessions from the Prospect Street house at this date. (John Thomson Mason Account Book).

The new owners of the Prospect Street house, John and Elizabeth Teackle, had been leasing the house from the Masons before purchasing it. The Teackles were a distinguished family from Kegotank, Accomac County, Virginia. Teackle had extensive business and land interests. He was a son of Levin Teackle and married Elizabeth Dennis, daughter of Littleton and Susanna (Upshur) Dennis of "Beverly on Pocomoke." (Whitelaw).

John Teackle was a Federalist and was closely allied by political views, as well as by personal friendship, with other Federalist leaders such as Josiah Quincy and Thomas Sim Lee. Mrs. Quincy's letters describe their frequent visits to the Teackle home. (Quincy). The Teackles had three daughters, one of whom, Henrietta, was married to Elihu Chauncey in the parlor of the Prospect Street house on October 13, 1810. A week after the wedding the Teackles vacated the house.

Dr. Charles Worthington, who bought the house from the Teackles, first came to Georgetown in 1783 from Anne Arundel County, where the Worthingtons have long been an important family. He was born at "Summer Hill" in Anne Arundel County on October 8, 1759, and was a younger son of Colonel Nicholas and Catherine (Griffith) Worthington.

He was granted his M.D. in 1782 by the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Worthington volunteered at once for military service, and on July 31, 1782 he was appointed Surgeon in the Continental Navy and assigned to the four galleys under the command of Captain Zachariah Walley. This squadron patrolled the Chesapeake Bay against raids by the Royal Navy. Dr. Worthington was honorably discharged on January 31, 1783. (Newman)

Dr. Charles Worthington practiced medicine in Georgetown for 55 years. Before moving to this house in 1810, he had lived in a house at the southwest corner of Market (now 33rd) and Bridge (now M) Streets.

On February 14, 1788 Dr. Charles Worthington married Miss Elizabeth Booth of Jamestown, Virginia. The Worthingtons had five children. Their eldest son, Nicholas W. Worthington, received his M.D. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1807. He stayed on in the family homestead on Bridge Street, later bequeathed to him by his father, and died there in 1849. John Griffith Worthington, the second son, moved to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1849. The third son, William N. Worthington, died in Washington in 1842, leaving a young widow and a son. The two Worthington daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth Ann (Eliza), and the two younger sons lived in the Prospect Street house with their parents.

When he moved to Prospect Street in 1810, Dr. Charles Worthington was well-established in his profession and in the affairs of the community. He was an active member of St. John's Episcopal Church in Georgetown and served as a vestryman for several years, beginning in 1807. He was also the first president of the Medical Society formed in the District of Columbia. In politics he was an old-line Federalist. Personally austere, dignified and serious, Dr. Worthington kept the old style of hair in queue, knee breeches, and shoe buckles until his dying day.

During the War of 1812, Dr. Worthington brought wounded British officers (evidently paroled prisoners) to this house and gave them an opportunity to recuperate there as his guests. After the war they presented him with a gold snuffbox (mentioned in his Will) as a token of their gratitude. (Newman; Vestry Minutes)

On September 3, 1816 the Reverend John A. Grassi, S.J., President of Georgetown College, solemnized the marriage of Elizabeth Ann Worthington to Congressman William Gaston of North Carolina in the parlor of her father's Prospect Street residence. (Schauinger; Durkin)

Dr. Charles Worthington lived in the Prospect Street house for more than a quarter of a century. He is said to have called the house "Quality Hill," a name also used by later owners. He died in this house on September 10, 1836, when he was 76 years old. In his Will Dr. Worthington left the house on Prospect Street to his eldest daughter, Catherine, the widow of Joseph Pearson, a former Congressman also from North Carolina. (Newman)

Her name last appears in the Washington City Directory for 1892. The 1866 Directory also lists "Robert, clk. Comm. Dept." at the same address. Robert S. Kearney, son of Colonel James and Louisa Kearney, was an official of the War Department for more than forty years. He lived at 42 First (N) Street in Georgetown from 1868 to 1870 and at 73 Fayette (35th) Street from 1871 to 1874, then moved to Alexandria. He returned to the Prospect Street House in 1900 and was living there when the house was sold in 1915. Blanche Kearney, a daughter of Colonel James and Louisa Kearney, first appears in the City Directory for 1876, residing with her mother. George Kearney, another son, is listed at different times as assistant librarian at the Library of Congress, librarian of the Justice department, and as a lawyer. He edited a number of official publications, including the State Department series of documents on foreign relations. He is listed as head of the household in 1915, but did not reside at the Prospect Street house continuously. (City Directories)

On June 20, 1856 Catherine Worthington Pearson conveyed the house and land, comprising lots 41 and 42, to James Kearney for the purchase price of \$6000. Membes of the Kearney family resided in this house from 1856 until 1915.

James Kearney was born in Ireland. On April 11, 1813 he was commissioned as an Infantry Lieutenant in the United States Army and the following day was transferred to the Topographical Engineers. (Abert and Kearney; Powell). During his nearly early fifty years of active military duty Colonel Kearney rose to be Chief Topographical Engineer. He retired as a Colonel on September 9, 1861.

Colonel James Kearney and his family lived in the city of Washington during most of his active service. For many years their home was at the corner of 14th and F Streets, N.W. In 1855 Colonel Kearney is listed at 80 Prospect Street, so that the family had evidently moved to "Quality Hill" before buying it in 1856. He died in his Prospect Street house on January 10, 1862. In his Will, Colonel Kearney left all of his property to his wife, Louisa Kearney. She continued to live in the house after his death.

On July 5, 1915, Louise Kearney, James' daughter, married Prince Agustin de Iturbide. Agustin was the grandson of Emperor Agustin I, Liberator of Mexico, and Empress Ana Maria Huarte de Iturbide (who after he husband's death came to Georgetown to live); and he was the son of Prince Angel and Alice Green de Iturbide (granddaughter of General Uriah Forrest). At the time of his wedding he was professor of Spanish and French at the Georgetown College preparatory school. (Evans). Louise Kearney de Iturbide and her husband sold the Prospect Street house immediately after their marriage and set up their home at Pelham Courts, 2115 P Street N.W.

Albert Adsit Clemons, the next owner of the John Thomson Mason House, was an eccentric individual who lived nearby at Halcyon House (3400 Prospect Street) (HABS No. D.C.-69) Among other peculiarities, he was a compulsive collector of miscellaneous articles, ranging from genuine art objects to the residue of demolished buildings. He never lived in his house at 3425 Prospect Street but used it as storage space for his miscellaneous collections. During Clemons' ownership "Quality Hill" was known in the neighborhood as the "haunted house." (The Evening Star, March 28, 1938)

Clemons died in 1938. The proceeds of his estate, including 3425 Prospect street, were bequeathed to Harvard University. After the contents of the John Thomson Mason House were donated to museums throughout the country or sold at auction, the house was conveyed in 1942 to Lady Norma Bowler Lewis. (Will of Albert Adsit Clemons).

Lady Lewis was the wife of the eminent scholar and journalist, Sir Willmott Lewis. In 1942 they began major restoration of the structure. In 1944 the Lewises were able to move into their new home. Lord Lewis covered the major events of the war period for the London Times. He retired in 1949 and died the next year. Lady Lewis remained in the house until 1961 when she sold it to Senator and Mrs. Claiborne Pell and moved to a smaller house nearby.

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Prepared by Volunteers for the
Commission of fine Arts
Washington, D.C.
1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This symmetrical, well proportioned, free standing two-story brick house lives up to its early name, "Quality Hill." It has been carefully restored and cared for, and contains a wealth of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century detail.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good, well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 56'-0" by 42'-0", with a 40'-6" by 18'-0" two-story brick ell at the northeast corner. Main block has five bays across Prospect Street and three bays across 35th Street, and is three stories high including the finished attic floor. Exterior painted light gray with white trim.
2. Foundations: Brick.
3. Wall construction: Brick, flemish bond, painted; molded stone water table at first floor line, painted.
4. Porches: Front steps are Aquia Creek sandstone, in generally good condition, and have mid-twentieth century iron rails repeating the circle motif of the other front fencing.
5. Chimneys: Two; one at each gable end.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance has a pair of three-paneled doors topped by a graceful fanlight and set into a paneled, arched reveal. There are fluted pilasters each side supporting a finely molded triangular pediment. The rear center door has six flat panels, no transom, and is set in a shallow paneled reveal. It has Doric pilasters with pronounced entasis and a rather heavy triangular pediment, apparently of early to mid twentieth-century date.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Windows in general are twelve-over-twelve-light double hung wood sash, with painted stone sills and lintels, which have molded key blocks. Shutters on front and sides are heavy wood louvered replacements; but those in the rear are of raised panel design, with one small panel above one long panel.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable with ridge running east-west. Slate covering.
- b. Framing: Wood.
- c. Cornice: Modillioned wood cornice. Hanging metal ogee gutter.
- d. Dormers: Three on south and three on north elevations. Wood frame with slate sides and six-over-six-light wood double hung sash and triangular pediments.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor has center hall with stair in ell to west rear; living room on west of entry hall; library in southeast corner; dining room in northeast corner.
- b. Second floor has stair hall in northwest corner; master bedroom in southwest corner; bath in center south; study in southeast corner; bedroom in northeast corner with bath over pantry in addition at northeast corner. Addition also has servant's suite accessible only from pantry below.
- c. Third floor was not open to the researcher.
- d. Basement has two large rooms in southeast and southwest corners; kitchen and stairs in northwest corner; wine cellar under northeast addition.

2. Stairways: Main stair is a straight run from east to west along north wall to a rectangular landing along west wall, and from there on up to the second floor. The plan repeats to the third floor. The balusters are simple rectangular pickets and the handrail is simple molded mahogany, ending in a volute. Occasional balusters are of painted metal of the same section as the wood baluster with angle extensions top and bottom for support. A stained chair rail echoes the handrail. Newels are square open box shapes apparently made from one piece. Landings cross window on west wall.
3. Flooring: Wide, random-width pine throughout, except white marble octagons with black squares in vestibule, vinyl in upstairs baths, pantry, kitchen, and basement.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Painted plaster throughout, generally pastel in tone except library, where walls are red.
5. Doorways and doors: In general doors have six flat panels and wide backband trim. Doors on the second floor have similar moldings but have panels raised on one side. All doors are painted except the inside front door and the library doors, which are stained. The doorway from vestibule to hall has an elaborate wood-muntined fanlight and simple side lights. Parts of this glass wall appear to be mid-twentieth century but the door and fanlight are old and were taken from the now demolished Francis Scott Key House.
6. Decorative features and trim: Cornices in general are painted plaster box cornices with crown and bed molds. In the living room the crown is formed of separate acanthus leaves, the bed of egg-and-dart, and there is a frieze filled with rinceau scrolls. In the library the moldings are straight run wood, stained. In the dining room the crown is leaf-molded and there are egg-and-dart and lamb's tongue bed molds. Upstairs cornices are straight-run moldings similar to those downstairs but are smaller.

Door and window trim is generally wide with a molded backband. The library door trim is a replacement and has a leaf carved molding in the backband; the original window trim remains.

There are two-piece chair rails in the living room, dining room, library, upstairs halls and bedrooms; there is a wainscot with raised panels in the main entry hall-stair hall; there is a flat-paneled wainscot with a simple bull-nose cap in the vestibule.

Mantelpieces, while varied in design from room to room, are of similar character throughout. The one exception is a small plain white marble mantelpiece in the northeast bedroom. Traces of a larger hearth in the floor and patches in the chair rail indicate that this is a replacement. The other mantels are as follows:

Living room: Reeded pilasters and frieze, vertical elliptical rosettes above pilasters, square fan center, bowed shelf with reeded border and concave breaks over pilaster, painted. Black marble hearth and surround.

Library: Reeded half-oval pilasters, reeded frieze, flat elliptical panel in center, molded shelf with square breaks at pilasters, stained. Black marble hearth and surround.

Dining room: Pilasters have pearl-molded panels. Reeded imposts and center panel, complex carved fan motif each side of center, molded straight shelf, painted. Black marble hearth and surround.

Master bedroom: Pilasters have pearl-molded panels, oval rosettes at imposts, reeded and fan-carved frieze, molded straight shelf, painted. Black marble hearth and surround.

Study: Pilasters have plain panels, frieze has three panels across, dentil molded straight shelf, stripped of paint but not refinished. Black marble hearth and surround.

Bedroom: White marble flat pilasters and entablatures, turned corner rosettes, gilt bronze mask in center, no moldings except shelf edge. Gray marble hearth and surround.

7. Hardware: Many doors retain original hardware. Hinges are self-closing wrought iron except inner front door, which has plain silver butt-hinges. There are many large iron box rimlocks with silver knobs and key escutcheons on the first floor and with brass knobs and key escutcheons on the second floor. The southwest bedroom has cast brass rimlocks with brass knobs and escutcheons. Front door knobs are large silver-plated ribbed balls, somewhat worn.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Boiler in basement, radiators throughout.
 - b. Lighting: There are a variety of chandeliers in the house, none of them original furnishings. The library has a brass circular chandelier with eight crystal arms and bobeches. It is not electrified. The dining room

has an all-crystal electrified chandelier. The master bedroom has a very tall French style bronze and crystal electrified chandelier, originally gas. Several types of electric lantern-style fixtures light the hallways. There are two large silver coach lanterns at the front door.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Located on the northeast corner of 35th and Prospect Streets, the house faces south. The neighborhood is composed of somewhat smaller houses, with the exceptions of Halcyon House (3400 Prospect Street, HABS No. DC-69) and Prospect House (3508 Prospect Street, HABS No. DC-210). The area is a well-maintained residential neighborhood with some educational buildings to the west.
2. Enclosures: Wrought and cast iron ornamental fence at both sides of entrance door, fence continues down 35th Street to the rear entrance. Rear yard enclosed by brick wall topped with an iron fence.
3. Walks: Brick.
4. Landscaping: Residential scale foundation planting along street facades, rear yard carefully planted around grass area and brick paved terrace. There is a marble wall fountain against the west wall of the rear addition, and a marble statuary group in the northwest corner.

Prepared by The Office of
Walter G. Peter, Jr., AIA
Architect
November 18, 1968

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a project to record structures in the western part of the Georgetown Historic District in Washington, D.C. The project was conducted by the Commission of Fine Arts with the cooperation of the Historic American Buildings Survey. The resulting documentation was donated to HABS by the Commission and published in 1970 in HABS Selection Number 6, "Georgetown Architecture Northwest: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia". Research for the project was conducted by volunteers under the supervision of Ms. Nancy Black, staff member of the Commission of Fine Arts. Architectural information was prepared by The Office of Walter G. Peter, Jr., AIA. The photographs were taken by J. Alexander. The data was edited and prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS architectural historian Emily J. Harris in 1979.

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JOHN THOMSON MASON HOUSE
(Quality Hill)
(Worthington House)
Georgetown
3425 Prospect Street, Northwest
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS DC-167
DC, GEO, 11-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN THOMSON MASON HOUSE
(Quality Hill)
(Worthington House)

This report is an addendum to a 18 page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 3425 Prospect Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: Mr. and Mrs. Claiborne Pell

Present Use: private residence

Significance: Considered one of the finest of the few surviving large, free-standing, late eighteenth-century town houses in Georgetown, this structure has a high degree of original detailing, is exceedingly well proportioned, and is unusual for its stairs, which run perpendicular to the centrally placed hall and have distinctive newels. The John Thomson Mason House also derives significance for its prominent owners such as former Senator and Mrs. Pell, whose heirlooms, by age, quality, and long family association, fit perfectly in this Federal Period home.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1797- 1798. John Thomson Mason bought Lots 41 and 42 in Georgetown for 450 pounds in 1798. The lots were described as "... in the tenure and occupation of the said John Thomson Mason..." The price and wording of the deed indicate that the house was already standing in 1798. Furthermore, a letter written by him in March 1798 mentions his residence in Georgetown. The structure was assessed as a "new house" in the 1800-1807 assessment records.

2. Architect: Unknown

3. Original and subsequent owners: The building is located in Square 1221, Lot 835 out of Lot 808 (formerly Square 41, Lot 42 in Peter, Beatty, Threlkeld and Deakins Addition to Georgetown). Its original address was 80 Prospect Street.

1798 Deed (Liber D4, folio 85)

ADDENDUM TO
JOHN THOMSON MASON HOUSE
HABS No. DC-167
(page 20)

- John Threkeld and wife
To
John Thomson Mason
- 1807 Deed (Liber T19 folio 36)
John Thomson Mason and wife
To
John Teackle
- 1810 Deed (Liber Z25 folio 356)
John Teackle and wife
To
Charles Worthington
- 1836 Will (Will Book 4, page 325)
To
daughter Catherine Pearson, and her heirs
- 1856 Deed in Trust (Liber JAS 121, folio 129)
Catherine Pearson
To
James Kearney
- 1862 Will (Will Book 9, page 25)
To
wife Louisa Kearney
- 1889 Deed (Liber 149 folio 320)
Louisa Kearney
To
Maria O'Reiley
- 1898 Deed (Liber 2331, Folio 30)
Maria O'Reiley
To
Blanche Kearney
- 1910 Kearney dies and names her nephew, Alexander Kearney,
- 1915 Degree of Supreme Court of D.C. (Equity 32401, Docket 70)
A. Leftwich Sinclair, trustee for Louise Kearney, Louise de Iturbide (nee
Kearney) and husband, Augustin

ADDENDUM TO
JOHN THOMSON MASON HOUSE
HABS No. DC-167
(page 21)

To
Albert Adsit Clemons

1938 Clemons dies and trustees appointed

1942 Deed (Liber 7801, folio 197)
F. Urban Wolpert, George H. Paltridge, William E. Huntington, trustees
To
Norma Bowler

1961 Deed (Liber 11598, folio 173)
Norma Bowler Lewis
To
Claiborne Pell and wife, Nuala Pell

The above chain of title was taken from the earlier HABS documentation of the property.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information available .

4. Original plans and construction: No information available.

5. Alterations and additions: The house was restored between 1942-1944 by Lady Lewis. The restoration included installation of electricity, heating and plumbing, and structural repairs such as shoring up walls, sheathing and tiling the roof. Paint was removed from mantels, and one mantel in the northeast bedroom was replaced. The former stable was converted to a pantry. The twin front doors were added; they consist of one reportedly salvaged by Albert Clemons during alterations on the U.S. Capitol, and one copied to match it. The arch in the center hall supposedly came from the Francis Scott Key House (HABS No. DC-23), and the black and white tile floor in the vestibule came from an old building on Capitol Hill. Source: interviews with Lady Norma Bowler Lewis. It is not known if any of this statements were independently corroborated for the 1969 HABS report.

B. Historical Context:

John Thomson Mason, educated at William and Mary, was a prominent lawyer and was offered the position of Attorney General by President Jefferson and later by President Madison. He declined twice.

Subsequent owners included Dr. Charles Worthington, whose family produced several important Georgetown physicians and owned other houses such as The Leonard Mackall House (HABS No. DC-835).

Another well known owner was Albert Adsit Clemons who used this property as storage for items he could not fit into his residence, Halycon House (HABS No. DC-69).

The next owner was Lady Lewis, the wife of the eminent scholar and journalist, Sir Willmott Lewis. They undertook a major restoration in 1942 and moved in two years later.

The most prominent owners are former Senator Claiborne Pell and his wife. Descended from a distinguished Rhode Island patrician family, steeped in public service, the Princeton and Columbia educated Pell served in the Congress and Senate, as well as the Coast Guard and State Department. The author of several books and articles, the senator was honored for his public service by the naming of a federal grant after him.

(The above is an edited version of the Part I prepared by the Volunteers for the Commission of Fine Arts, 1969. See project information. The materials on the Pells were added by Bill Lebovich)

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: In the 1969 HABS documentation, architect Walter G. Peter wrote: "This symmetrical, well proportioned, free standing two-story brick house lives up to its early name, 'Quality Hill.' It has been carefully restored and cared for, and contains a wealth of late eighteen and early nineteenth century detail." Dating to the height of the Federal Period, and showing the typical flat brick surfaces only relieved by slightly projecting lintels and sills, the John Thomson Mason is also atypical of the period in its robust pedimented gable end and generous size of the rooms, especially the drawing room, entrance hall and stair hall. Perhaps, this house is more of a transitional house, combining Federal Period tastes in terms of detailing with the more masculine tastes of either the earlier Georgian period or the later classical revival in terms of spatial relationships. Or another interpretation is that the house has been more altered on the interior than Walter Peter realized. Regardless of interpretation, the house sits well, that is with dignity, upon the site, to paraphrase the late Brendan Gill, and the interior is intimate and yet spacious.

2. Condition of fabric: The house and garden are in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Approximately 56' by 42', with a 40.5' by 18' two story brick ell at the northeast corner. Main block has five bays across Prospect Street and three bays across 35th Street and is three stories high including the attic floor. The exterior brick has been painted brick, but much of the gray has faded from the Prospect Street (the main facade) side.

The relationship between the main block and the ell is quite awkward, suggesting that the ell, supposedly built as a stable (according to the 1969 documentation), was built later than the main block. The northwest corner of the ell intersects the main block a mere inches to the side of the eastern most windows on the rear of the main block, too close to allow for shutters on east side of those windows. Although it is impossible to get a clear view, it appears that the joint between the ell and main block is a cold joint, sealed by epoxy. It is anticipated that more thorough examination would uncover differences between the brick and coursing between the rear main block and ell. The ell has a slight stringcourse, while the main block does not. On the interior of the ell, the closet along the east wall has the outside wall of the stairs on the adjacent house, 3423 Prospect Street.

2. Foundations: Brick

3. Walls: Brick, Flemish bond in main block, except for rear facade. Common bond on rear facade and ell. Main block and ell painted gray

4. Structural system, framing: It is assumed that the system is load bearing brick walls.

5. Porches, stoops: Front steps are Aquia Creek sandstone, in generally good condition, and have mid-twentieth century iron rails repeating the circle motif (below the top rail) of the other front fencing. Since the house was restored 1942-1944, the fence and rails probably date to then.

6. Chimneys: Two, one rectangular one at each gable end. The east chimney serves two stacks and the west serves one stack (at least on the first floor).

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance has a pair of three-paneled doors topped by a graceful fanlight and set into a paneled, arched reveal. There are fluted pilasters each side supporting a finely molded pediment. The rear center door has fix flat panels, no transom, and is set in a shallow paneled reveal. It has Doric pilasters with an exaggerated entasis and a rather heavy pediment, apparently of early to mid 20th century. There are also three secondary doors, one on the rear of the main block, near 35th Street and two on the west side of the ell.

b. Windows: Windows in general are twelve-over-twelve-light double hung wood sash, with painted stone stills and flat arch lintels, with keystones. Shutters on front and sides are heavy wood louvered replacements; but those in the rear are of raised panel design, with one small panel above one long panel. On the front facade, below the first floor shutters there are half circles, with opening at top, incised into the brick, suggesting that at some point for a long period of time, the earlier shutters had a metal mechanism, maybe a hook that carved the brick as the metal moved through an arc, perhaps as the shutters were being opened and closed.

The windows in the basement on the south facade are set within arched brick openings, but the window headers are flat.

On the north facade, in front of the rear door is a grill to provide light for a basement window set several feet below the rear door. The depth of this window suggests that the rear yard was originally several feet lower.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Gable, ridge running east-west; slate covering.

b. Cornice, eaves: Modillioned wood cornice. The cornice on the south facade differs from the cornice of the west facade pediment in that the space between the modillions on the south has rosettes. On the west the space is filled with glyphs. Hanging metal ogee gutter.

c. Dormers: Added later, there are three dormers on south and three dormers on north elevations. The dormers are wood frame with slate sides, have six-over-six light wood double hung sash and pediment. The most eastern dormer on the north facade also has a fire escape (as does an attic window on the west facade). On the west wall of the ell, close to the main block, a broken pedimented dormer, with slate siding, breaks the line of cornice so the dormer is half below and half above the cornice.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Two large rooms in southeast and southwest corners; kitchen and stairs in northwest corner; wine cellar under northeast addition. (This description is from the 1969 HABS write-up. The space is a separate rental unit and was not accessible to the current researcher.)

b. First floor: A center hall runs from the main facade door on the south to the garden door on the north. Three rooms and the stairs open off the hall. The living room is the room on the west of the hall and behind it is an open stair hall perpendicular to the entrance hall. The first door east of entrance is the library and behind (north) of it is the dining room, with the pantry behind the dining room.

The most distinctive feature of the hall is the arches at the intersection of the main hall and the cross hall for the stairs. The arches, which supposedly came out off the Francis Scott Key House which was demolished in the early twentieth century for the construction of Key Bridge, are at right angles to each other and in essence, demarcate the end of the front hall and the start of the stair hall.

c. Second floor: The stair hall is in the northwest corner; master bedroom in southeast corner; a study in the northeast corner and a third bedroom with bath over pantry in addition at northeast corner. Two suites of bathrooms were created during 1942-1944 renovation in hall that existed between the bedrooms. Addition also has servant's suite accessible only from pantry below.

d. Third floor: Consisting of small bedrooms, and one room had an interior window bringing light from the stair hall windows and dormer into the room.

2. Stairway: Main stair is a straight run from east to west along north wall to a rectangular landing along west wall, and from there on up to the second floor. The plan repeats to the third floor. The balusters are simple rectangular pickets and the handrail is simple molded mahogany, ending in a volute. Occasional balusters are of painted metal of the same section as the wood baluster, with angled extensions top and bottom for support. A chair rail echoes the handrail. The unusual newels are square open shapes apparently made from one piece. The handsome stringers are double curves with a smaller curve incised in the stringer. The end of the stringer dips down into another curve. Landings cross window on the west wall. Where the stairs ascends on the north wall, there is one window which is slightly above the stairs, suggesting that both the stairs and window are original. (In other Federal period houses, where the stairs are later renovations, they often dissect stairs.)

3. Flooring: The floors are wide, random-width pine throughout, except for the white marble octagons with black squares in the vestibule, vinyl in upstairs baths, pantry, kitchen, and basement.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are painted plaster and generally light in color, except for the library which has red painted walls and wooden built in bookcases and other wood treatments, such as paneled window reveals (the rooms also have paneled window reveals).

There are two-piece chair rails in the living room, dining room, library, upstairs halls and bedrooms. There is a wainscot with raised panels in the main entry hall-stair hall, and a flat-paneled wainscot with a simple bull-nose cap in the vestibule.

Baseboards are capped by ogee moulding.

Cornices in general are painted plaster box cornices with crown and bed molds. In the living room the crown is formed of separate acanthus leaves, the bed of egg-and-dart, and there is a frieze filled with rinceau scrolls. In the library the mouldings are straight run wood, stained. In the dining room the crown is leaf-molded and there are egg-and-dart and lamb's tongue bed molds. Upstairs cornices are straight-run mouldings similar to those downstairs, but smaller.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: In general the doors have six flat panels and wide backband trim. Doors on the second floor have similar moldings but have panels raised on one side. All doors are painted except the inside front door and the library doors which are stained. The doorway from the vestibule to hall has an elaborate wood-muntined fanlight and simple side lights. Parts of this glass wall appear to be mid-twentieth century but the door and fanlight are old and were supposedly taken from the now demolished Francis Scott Key House. Door trim is generally wide with a molded backband. The library door trim is a replacement and has a leaf carved molding in the backband.

b. Windows: Like the door trim, the window trim is generally wide with a molded backband. As mentioned above the windows have shall paneled reveals. The windows are encased in full drapes.

6. Decorative features and trim: Mantelpieces, while varied in design from room to room are of similar character. The one exception is a small plain white marble mantelpiece in the northeast bedroom. Traces of a larger hearth in the floor and patches in the chair rail indicate that is a replacement. The other mantels are as follows:

Living room: Reeded pilasters and frieze, vertical elliptical rosettes above pilasters, square fan center, bowed shelf with reeded border and concave breaks over pilaster, painted. Black marble hearth and surround.

Library: Reeded half-oval pilasters, reeded frieze, flat elliptical panel in center, molded shelf with square breaks at pilasters, stained. Black marble hearth and surround.

Dining Room: Pilasters have pearl-molded panels. Reeded imposts and center panel, complex carved fan motif each side of center, molded straight shelf, stripped of paint, but not refinished. Black marble hearth and surround.

Master bedroom: Pilasters have pearl-molded panels, oval rosettes at imposts, reeded and fan-carved frieze, molded straight shelf, painted. Black marble hearth and surround.

Study: Pilasters have plain panels, frieze has three panels across, dentil molded straight shelf, stripped of paint, but not refinished. Black marble hearth and surround.

Bedroom: White marble flat pilasters and entablatures, turned corner rosettes, gilt bronze mask in center, no moldings except shelf edge. Gray marble hearth and surround.

7. Hardware: Many doors retain original hardware. Hinges are self-closing wrought iron except inner front door, which has plain silver butt-hinges. There are many large iron box

rimlocks with silver knobs and key escutcheons on the first floor and with brass knobs and key escutcheons on the second floor. The southwest bedroom has cast brass rimlocks with brass knobs and escutcheons. Front door knobs are large silver-plated ribbed balls, somewhat worn. Although the hardware is old, it is probable that at least some of it has been moved or the doors the hardware is on have been moved. Specifically, the first floor bathroom door has a rimlock that would be more appropriate and likely on an outside door.

8. Mechanical systems: Boiler in basement and radiators throughout.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: This property occupies the northeast corner of the intersection of Prospect Street and 35th Street and faces south. There is a small grass area to either side of the steps in the front and a tall brick wall along 35th Street and the alley north of the parcel, with a curved drive off 35th Street outside the wall for a car and a gate providing access to a door to the house and a gate to the backyard.

The long backyard has a nearly square brick terrace filling the angle formed by the intersection of the main block and kitchen wing. Beyond the terrace, the lawn is flanked by shrubs and at the far northern end of the yard is a grouping of sculpture. There is also sculpture along the west wall of the wing.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown, but there is some evidence to suggest that originally the rear yard is much lower than it is now as the basement window beneath the rear door is several feet below the ground.

3. Outbuildings: The only outbuildings are a shed at the northeast corner of the parcel and some storage bins along the 35th Street wall.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In 1969 volunteers for the Commission on Fine Arts prepared the historic information and Walter G. Peter, AIA prepared the architectural information. It was published the next year as HABS Selections Number 6, "Georgetown Architecture-Northwest: Northwest Washington, District of Columbia." HABS architectural historian Emily J. Harris edited the information and transmitted it to the Library of Congress as part of the HABS collection in 1979. The earlier versions of the HABS Report carry detailed bibliographies. Lebovich did review recent newspaper files but worked primarily from the earlier materials, changing them to reflect the renovated state of the house and to provide a more historically balanced evaluation of the house.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, May 2000

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrdy, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.